ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

TRUSTEES

OF THE

MISSISSIPPI STATE INSTITUTION

FOR THE

EDUCATION OF THE BLIND.

AT JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI.

FOR THE YEAR ENDING SEPTEMBER 30th, 1866.

TO THE GOVERNOR OF MISSISSIPPI.

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OFFICERS OF THE INSTITUTION.

TRUSTEES.

REV. JOHN HUNTER, PRESIDENT.
JOHN W. ROBINSON, SECRETARY.
JOSHUA GREEN, TREASURER.
ALEX. VIRDEN, AUDITOR.
M. W. BOYD, M. D., PHYSICIAN.

VISITOR.

HON. WM. YERGER.

SUPERINTENDENT AND PRINCIPAL TEACHER.

WILLIAM MERRILL, A. M.

MATRON AND TEACHER.

MRS. S. B. MERRILL.

ASSISTANT TEACHERS AND MUSIC.

MISS. MARY M. MERRILL.
MISS. LIZZIE G. MERRILL.
WM. BUSCH, PROF. OF MUSIC.

REPORT.

To His Excellency, Gov. Humphreys:

When the last Report of the Trustees of the Mississippi State Institution for the Blind, was presented to your Excellency, October 1st 1865, its financial condition was as follows:

Funds in Treasury Oct. 1st, 1865.

Cotton Money, about	$2,500
Auditor's Warrant, April 1865,	$2,000
Claim for Quarterly appropriation due July 1st 1865,	$2,000
The Institution then owed about	$3,400

Believing that the warrant for 2,000, and the quarterly appropriation for July, would be paid as soon as money was in the Treasury, it was believed that the Board could pay its debts, and have the regular appropriation to meet currant expenses and the $5,000 contingent fund for repairs, and furniture.

By act of the Legislature, payment of warrants and appropriations, previous to October 15th, 1865 was stopped, thus cutting off $4,000, which we had relied upon to meet our liabilities, and also cutting off our income during one-half of the month of October.

No funds were received from the Treasury, until January 31st 1866, at which time, we received the regular appropriations for quarters commencing October 15th, 1865, and January 15th 1866, the amount being $4,000.

The current expenses of the Institution, for October, November, December and January, had increased the debt to about $7,000.

It will be seen that the funds received would not pay the debts of the Institution, leaving nothing for its support during three months, until next quarterly payment.

At the same time, it was necessary to make repairs upon the place, and supply such furniture as was absolutely indispensible; the school being in an exceedingly destitute condition.

The Board had relied upon the contingent fund to make those repairs, and supply the Institution with furniture, musical instruments, &c., but we were obliged to use the contingent fund, which your Excellency promptly furnished at our request, to meet the current expenses, and pay the accumulated debt.

As furniture must be bought, and repairs made to some extent, we have done the best we could.

From the 1st of October 1865, to the 1st of October 1866, the current expenses have been about $8,000; the amount spent for repairs, about $1,200; and for furniture, about 1,950; for debts due October 1st 1865, say $3,400.

It will be seen that the Institution has been managed with the most rigid economy; while the pupils have at all times been furnished with a good table, and everything needed for their comfort.

While the Trustees do not believe that a picayune meanness should find place in the management of a noble State charity; they do believe in a firm and rigid economy; and in this their views have been efficiently carried out by the Superintendent and Matron.

The annual current expenses of the Institution before the war, not including purchases of furniture, or repairs, amounted to $7,000 per annum. The number of pupils then did not average more than sixteen.

During the last school year, the number of pupils has averaged twenty; although the current expenses for the year, will not amount to more than $8,000 as above stated.

As everything used about the Institution, now costs at least double the price before the war, it will be easily seen how carefully the money of the State has been used.

When our last report was presented to your Excellency, the Superintendent knew of only fifteen pupils likely to be in the Institution, during the school year, which would have been about the average number of pupils before the war.

We are happy now to inform you that twenty-four pupils have been connected with the Institution, during the current year. As some came in late in the session, the average number would be about twenty.

There are in the State, at least forty blind youth, who ought to be educated. It has been found necessary in all States to go out and see the parents of blind children, and bring them into the school. Many parents of blind children, do not know that they can be educated, or that any provision has been

made for their gratuitous education by the State. In many of the States, it has been customary to make annual excursions, with from six to twelve pupils, into the different counties, giving exhibitions of their proficiency in studies, music, arts, &c. All these things cost money, and could not be attempted with the limited means at our command.

In purchasing furniture, we have bought only the most useful. The kitchen is now well furnished, and so are the sleeping apartments, with some few exceptions. The dining rooms are partly furnished; but the parlor, recitation, and music rooms, need attention.

It should be remembered, that travelers from all sections of the country, and from Europe, usually visit the Lunatic Asylums, and Institutions for the Blind, and for Deaf Mutes, as they travel from State to State; and they judge of the character, and enlightenment of the people and government of a State, by the condition of its public institutions. All the States take pride in fostering them.

Many have spent money very freely, to give to the unfortunate classes mentioned, all the means for mental and physical culture; and the results, have, in many cases, astonished the world. One State has probably spent a million of dollars on her Institution for the Blind, including individual donations. It has an organ that cost over $4,000, and over thirty pianos, some of them costly grand pianos.

The Missouri Institution, with only double our number of pupils, has fourteen pianos and an organ.

We have one piano, in constant use for seven years. The Superintendent has supplied one for the parlor, the past year, at his own expense.

The question comes then, why is the Institute so destitute? Has the State refused ever to furnish the necessary funds? We answer emphatically, no. The Legislature of Mississippi has always manifested a deep interest in its welfare; and has never, to our knowledge, refused an appropriation, asked for by the Board of Trustees. The furniture of the Institution, as is well-known to your Excellency, was taken for hospital purposes, during the war, and the Trustees have felt so strongly the necessity for rigid economy in every department of State expenditure, until we recover from our present depressed condition, that we have limited our call for appropriations to the smallest possible amount, and shall continue so to do, until a more favorable state of things is manifest.

Then we shall hope to see this, and all the public charities, so fitted up, as to be a credit to our State and people. The best mode of educating the Blind,—what class of studies to have taught, &c., have been matters of careful attention for many

years. Owing to the want of suitable text books in raised print, instruction is necessarily to a great extent oral, making their education a very laborious process to the teachers.

The main object of all education is to discipline the mind, to enable it to think with accuracy and power. When the mind is once properly disciplined, it is an easy matter to acquire knowlege. The question comes then, what studies best discipline the mind, and what are best adapted to the capacities of the Blind. The study of the Ancient and Modern Languages, and Mathematics, have been acknowleged by educators, and men of science to be the best adapted to those ends. In accordance with these views, the pupils in this Institution, have been instructed in the French and Latin Languages, and Mathematics in a thorough manner. Their progress has been such as to astonish all who have examined them.

Language taught orally, and as a spoken language, is the natural study of the human race. Every child learns a language, and it is as easy for him to learn Greek or Russian, as it is English. Taught on similar principles, orally, the blind learn the languages rapidly, and the mental power thus gained enables them to master other studies with great ease. The studies taught the last year have been:

Reading,	Spelling,
Grammer,	Geography,
Parsing,	Mental Arithmetic,
Written Arithmetic,	Algebra,
French,	Latin,

Chemistry, with daily lectures.
Music on Piano.
Music on Stringed Instruments.
Music, Vocal. Ornamental Bead Work.

The number of classes taught is large, as pupils are in different stages of advancement. We venture to say, that no Institution in Europe or America, can show pupils more thoroughly educated, than those of the Institution for the Blind in Mississippi.

The best mode of government, and the kind of discipline to be used in schools of all kinds, has been a matter of much discussion everywhere; and it has been a mooted question whether corporal punishment should ever be resorted to, especially in schools for the Blind.

These questions have been discussed in Convention of Teachers of the Blind—results given below.

"At a Convention of Teachers of the Blind, held in August 1853, comprising men eminent in their vocation, many of whom were themselves blind, it was decided that the fact of blindness should make no difference in the discipline of children." (New York Report 1858.)

The government of this Institution, under the present Superintendent, has always been characterized by kindness, firmness and efficiency, while corporeal and other punishments have been less used, than in any previous period of its history.

Instruction in some of the mechanic arts, is very important to blind males, as a means of support, after leaving the Institution.

We were making arrangements to re-open the work-shop the coming season, but the burning of the cottage buildings, used for that purpose, will prevent the accomplishment of our design for the present.

The Superintendent has recently visited several Institutions, to ascertain about improvements in machinery, modes of teaching, &c. These matters will be discussed in the future, when the information will be of more immediate use.

By changes in the law, as per code, the regular session of the Institution was lengthened from ten months of four weeks each, which is the regular school year of all Blind Institutions, and nearly all seeing schools, to ten calendar months; increasing the session three weeks, and proportionately increasing the expense, without any increase of income.

While our income for the first half of October was taken away, and our number of pupils to support, fifty per cent above the estimated number, it will be seen that we had no means of obeying this law, without greatly increasing the debt, and it is by no means easy to borrow money in these times.

We therefore gave orders to close the school at the usual time. We would respectfully request the repeal of the law referred to; as we believe the former rule to be the best for the pupils, the teachers, and the State.

A law was also passed changing the custom, which has always prevailed in this, and other Institutions, of having two dining rooms, one for the Superintendent and Teachers, and one for the pupils. To fulfil this law, would have required an enlargement of the dining room, and an increase in the number of servants. We had no funds to meet these increased expenses, and have directed the Superintendent to make no change until further orders.

We would respectfully request the repeal of the act approved Aug. 12th, 1864, for relief of Dempsey Sherrod, said act placing said Sherrod permanently in the Institution, and also his sister, a young lady with full sight, twenty years old to be educated and boarded by the State, free of expense so long as he may choose to enter himself as a pupil.

We know of no reason for granting such special privileges to Mr. Sherrod, rather than to any other respectable blind

person, in the State. We have had some applications, during the past school year, to receive blind persons into the Institution, upon the plea, that they were without a home elsewhere; but after consulting the Attorney-General we had to refuse.

Mr. Sherrod deserves great credit for his efforts in raising by subscription, &c., large sums of money, to print books for the Blind; but it has always been understood, that he was well paid for his services as agent, by the Trustees, of the fund so raised. If he has not been so paid, the Trustees should at once pay him a fair reward, out of funds now in their hands.

His claim for support, is on the Trustees of the fund so raised, not on the State, which contributed very liberally to the fund, nor on the Institution for the Blind, which has never received any benefit from said fund, either directly or indirectly up to the present time. We appreciate the motive which prompted the passage of the law; but the war is over, and it is proper that things should return to their normal condition. The Institution is not designed to be an asylum for the support of blind people of all ages. It is a school for the education of blind youth.

To receive adult Blind into the Institution for support, would completely subvert the objects of the Institution. They should be supported by the counties in which they belong, if unable to support themselves. One great object of this Institution, is so to educate blind youth, that they may be able to support themselves, after they leave school.

Mr. Sherrod finished his education in this school many years ago. He has entered himself as a pupil, for the last five years. His sister has been educated in the Institution as a day pupil, two years, and for two years, has been furnished with board and tuition, free of expense, making four years in all.

At present the law makes no limit in regard to the ages at which pupils are to be received, and to what age they may remain as pupils. The following extract from Report of the Indiana State Institution for the Blind, gives the largest period for admission of pupils of any blind school, that we know of. We would recommend the adoption of a similar rule, and also that no pupils be allowed to remain after 22 years old, unless by special act of the Board of Trustees.

"From ten to fourteen is the most favorable age for entering the Institute; provided the pupils have had judicious care and training at home, prior to that age. But as this is not always the case, and as there are many who lose their sight after that age; or, having lost it earlier, did not find an opportunity of going to school at the proper time, the regulations of the Institute allow of the admission of all proper subjects, who are not under eight or above twenty one years of age."

Our State has just reason to feel proud of its Institution for the Blind, and of itself, for its energy, and philanthrophy in sustaining the school through all the embarrassments of the last five years, when Institutions in some States failed altogether; and in others received but a precarious support. We know that we can always rely upon full sympathy from all departments of our State Government.

To put the Institution in complete order; to buy furniture, musical instruments, books, apparatus, and finish repairs, would require quite a large sum. As before remarked, we feel that rigid economy should be the rule in every department of State expenditure, and that this is no time to spend money for anything that can be dispened with. We therefore, ask for no new appropriation, and for no additional quarterly allowance; although we expect a larger number of pupils, and heavier expenses than heretofore.

We only ask the Legislature to order the payment of the Auditor's Warrant, now in our Treasury, drawn April 1865; and also to issue his warrant, for quarterly appropriations, due July 1st 1865; and for one half of the month of October 1865.

That the Legislatnre did not intend to deprive us of these funds is evident from the fact that the Joint Committee reported them, as funds at our command; and after they were rendered valueless by the act referred to, a hill was introduced in the House ordering payment of these claims during the last days of the session, and passed; but the Legislature adjourned before its passage was completed.

With these claims paid, we shall be able to pay our debts, make some needed repairs, and purchases, and sustain the Institution as heretofore.

We would earnestly invite your Excellency, and the members of the Senate and House of Representatives, to visit the school at any time most convenient, and examine it in every department.

We think that such an examination will satisfy any one, that we have not over estimated its efficiency and merits.

REV. JOHN HUNTER, President.
JNO. W. ROBINSON, Secretary.
JOSHUA GREEN, Treasurer.
A. VIRDEN, Auditor.
M. W. BOYD, M. D., Physician.
Board of Trustees.